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WRECK OF THE JANTHINA JANTHINA

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Early in February, 1939, we were heading across Tamiami Trail from the West coast of Florida, laden with a precious cargo of many fine specimens gathered on the treasure island, Sanibel.

A delightful afternoon and evening with friends on Miami Beach passed, the next morning, Tuesday, February 7th, 1939, we thought we would take a look at Key Largo. So off we went. Soon we were crossing to the island, turned left on Largo and a short distance up we found, as we had hoped, our little black friend, Thomas Jefferson. His eyes were shining and his white teeth beautiful by contrast, and a grand supply of tree snails, striped and mottled, some yellow, some deep brown and some ox-blood. I relieved him of most of them and he smiled the more.

Turning south in a little while we were at Largo's southern tip. There was an inviting Fisherman's Lodge. A good luncheon was served. In my eagerness to eye the beach, I assigned my mince pie and moved out. My eager impatience and my gastronomic restraint were immediately rewarded. There before my eyes on the beach, a large live *Janthina janthina*¹ lay, purple-bubbling, before me! A little distance away, another, and another and another! Two inlets deep in mud limited my scope of investigation. More than a dozen good specimens were safely "bagged" alive in my handkerchief, knotted at the four corners and several which were "broken hearted" and exhausted by reason of their separation from their native blue, had lately died!

¹ Also known as *Janthina fragilis*, but the Linnaean name *janthina* is now usually used.

A good Venus clam, two nice live cowries and several live discus clams added to my delight and made my day complete.

I noticed the wind. It was strong from the southeast and looked as if it would continue so through the night and be as good or better in the morning. I did my own figuring and had my hopes but said nothing. Back we went to Miami past the "Sausage trees" and other things of great interest and beauty.

Next morning early we were loaded off on our northern trip for Miami Beach. The wind was still strong from the southeast, almost a young storm! I could hardly wait to reach the beach! Were the violets beauties coming in? Had the wind which beached them on lower Largo reached and passed where we were?

At the first opening to the beach I parked my car and my wife, head-on to the sea, so she could keep one eye on her knitting and one on the breakers as they came rolling in. A tip to a naturalist husband: Head your wife in your general direction so that she can look at something else more beautiful and you can maneuver undisturbed, for a time!

My first close-up of the beach was a thrill that beggars description. There before me and riding in on every wave that came were literally hundreds of the dainty purple shells and with them an innumerable number of gorgeous purple Portuguese Men-of-War, their long purple streamers stretching some of them ten feet away from the main float!

The curving line of the incoming tide was marked as far as the eye could discern, a brilliant purple. Purple shells, purple balloons, purple streamers, purple bubbles! Bubbles, bubbles, world without end bubbles. Every little shell had bubbles all its own! It was sad, too. Every little bubble was a part of the last tragic effort—the only effort the little fellow knew how to make to survive, and so lying still on the beach, each one, big ones, middle sized ones, little ones, each one lay there blowing bubbles! I had provided half a dozen Christmas-present handkerchiefs; out they came and were soon knotted into little bags. I piled them in—all sizes, bubbles and all—then began to pick and choose the largest, the deepest purple, the most perfect! Dripping purple at every step I made my way to the car and back again to the beach. The thrill is one never to be forgotten!

The sea gulls were collectors too; they came by dozens and worked away for a living on these precious beauties!

The greatest show I had ever seen was going on. How many millions of these violet gems lay, bubbles up, on the surface of the sea? How far up the beach would they be coming in? We moved on up the beach to the north, stopping every few hundred yards. Back to the beach I would go and the thrill was always repeated! There they were, literally thousands of them—bubbles, bubbles, purple bubbles and so many exquisite purple shells and fondled by and confused with thousands of Men-of-War!

The same marvel of purple necklaces spread on the beach everywhere, with each incoming wave changing and enlarging its beauty! Not till Fort Lauderdale was nearly reached did I finally leave the beach and the great display! How much further north they were, still landing and making that wonderful display of nature's best, I cannot say. I had seen them over a distance of 90 miles! That was enough.

Altogether I secured some 500 perfect specimens of all sizes and could have as easily secured 10,000 more.

How did I get them home? Well, what difference does one more smell make when you already have a car full? A half dozen cigar boxes at the first store in Fort Lauderdale relieved the handkerchiefs. We hung them out in the car to dry. They did, a mottled purple! They never looked the same! Every time a sight could be had of our Christmas 'kerchiefs, a full picture of the beach came back and happiness born of a pleasant recollection, returned.

How to clean them? Well, after several days they are "ripe" enough to respond perfectly to the gentle pressure of a small jet of water. Carefully applied they are perfectly cleaned and not one is injured by the process. The color remains as it does today.

I have read and rejoiced over the thrill of Mr. Charles T. Simpson at Key West in January, 1883 (reported in NAUTILUS, April, 1897), when his good fortune landed him in such a familiar state of bliss. Now it was mine!

